

## A Complicated Valentine by kirabook

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**Summary:**

One story leads to an unintentional coming out  
February 1986

## A Complicated Valentine

Everyone in the Party used various techniques to explain holidays.

Mike always gave a straightforward answer in terms she understood. Lucas answered her questions then quizzed her to make sure she got the point. Dustin went off on tangents involving trivia and comics, leaving her more confused than informed. Max provided the shortest and bluntest explanation possible, but the mention of holidays bothered her for reasons El didn't understand.

Then there was Will.

“Last year, he brought mom chocolate and flowers. We never told him but... Jonathan and I ate most of the chocolate.”

It was a cool Friday evening. She sat with Will at the Byers' kitchen table. While he did his homework, Will provided her with paper, crayons and stories. El had homework too, but the assignments were simple and easy to compared to his. He always finished his homework early to free up the rest of the weekend.

“A card too, right?” She asked, folding another sheet of paper in half. Her previous uneven attempts weren’t good enough for a Valentines card. Will promised to help after he finished his homework.

“That’s right. I think it’s on the wall over there. Bob always did things like that...”

“So, you give cards to the person you love. Or like.” El reaffirmed, this is what the others told her too.

“Yes, but you can give a Valentine to anyone.” El paused mid paper crease and turned to Will.

“To anyone?”

“Yes,” Will smiled and nodded agreeably. “Me and Jonathan give mom a card every Valentines. A handmade one like the one you’re making. Sometimes, we get her a present too. Chocolate. Flowers. Even a balloon once. Valentines are for the person you like, but

everyone deserves something on Valentines.”

When Will glanced up, El nodded. He nodded too, returning to the homework. He wasn’t rushing to get it done, but he looked very disinterested in it.

“In elementary school, the teacher asked for everyone to bring a Valentine card for everyone in class. No one got left out and everyone got a card and candy.”

“Should make one for Hopper too?” El resumed folding the paper. It would be Mike’s card, but now Will added a long list of people to her list.

“If you want, yeah. He might like it.”

“One for Joyce?”

“Mom would love that, yeah.”

“What about our friends?”

Will hesitated, considering such a scenario. “I don’t know... I mean, I guess so? If you give everyone a card, the one you really want to give one to might not realize that they’re the one you like, which kinda sucks. But, that’s not a problem for you.”

“Oh.” The Party keenly knew of her relationship with Mike, true. No one would get confused if she made everyone a card. “Have you ever done it?”

“Given Valentines to our friends? Well yeah... in elementary school. Like that story from before,” he mumbled, trying to work through a particularly difficult question.

“When you gave one to everyone, the person you liked didn’t notice?” Will froze and his eyes widened. He looked... worried. His reaction puzzled her.

“Huh?”

“You said... if I gave one to everyone, the person I like won’t notice

and it sucks. So... it happened to you?"

"... No." Will shook his head, pretending to focus on his homework. "It happens though." He was lying, El knew.

Mike was straight forward. Lucas was precise. Dustin was vague. Max was blunt. Lastly, Will was the story teller.

Will told her personal stories, ones he assumed she would understand. Christmas? Thanksgiving? Fourth of July? Didn't matter. Will had a story, telling her all the expectations and norms. Valentines was no different.

"You gave your love a card, but they didn't notice it was special?" The more she restated the question, the more troubled Will became. When she asked Mike about similar topics, he squirmed and a blush covered his face. He'd groan and try to change the topic. This was different. Will wasn't embarrassed or shy, he was nervous and anxious. Afraid? He pretended not to hear her question, but the silence ate at him. He met her eyes, but didn't answer.

"... Who did you like?" She asked next.

"I've... never liked anyone."

El stared, picking apart his words. Will was a quiet guy who kept to himself. He's never been great at hiding the truth, but he excelled at keeping the truth unsaid. He lied sometimes, but never to her. Not anymore, not since last summer. She saw right through him so he didn't dare try.

Except right now.

"Will?"

"Yeah?" Will tapped his pencil on the paper, pretending he was doing something other than staring into space hoping she wouldn't push further. Unfortunately for him, she was too curious to let the issue drop now.

"Who did you like?"

Will opened and closed his mouth, struggling with what to say. He stopped pretending to do his homework and shifted his complete attention on her.

“I told you. I’ve never liked anyone,” he repeated unconvincingly. El rested her chin in her palms and leaned on the table.

“Never?”

Will sighed and rubbed his hands together, contemplating his words. “Ok, I did. But, I don’t like him anymore. At least, not like that.”

“Oh... What’s his name?”

“Huh?” Will stiffened.

“What’s his name?” She repeated, confused by Will’s overreaction.

“I-I never said he.”

“But you said, ‘I don’t like him anymore.’”

“I did?”

“You did,” she assured. A long uncomfortable pause passed. Will swallowed, scanned the room, then turned back to her.

“... You’re not... upset?” He spoke so softly it was almost a whisper.

“Upset?” Will nodded. El dropped her hands from her chin, trying to understand the strange direction their conversation drifted. “Upset about what?”

“About...” Will trailed off. His shoulders slumped and his expression softened. “Oh.” Another pause passed between them and a small smile crept on Will’s lips. His anxiety seemingly vanished as he returned to his homework. “I can’t tell you his name.”

El waited for him to explain, but he didn’t. “Why not?”

“Because... it’s embarrassing.”

“Please?”

“I really can’t,” he insisted.

“... Is it because he was mean? Did he do something bad?” Will shook his head and frowned.

“No no, nothing like that. Just... I guess... things change. I don’t feel that way anymore, but it’s ok since he’s still my friend.” Will smiled fondly.

“Oh! It’s one of our friends?” El narrowed the list. The boy was Will’s friend, and she knew all of Will’s friends. They were her friends too. Will froze and dropped his pencil, she wondered why he bothered trying to do it on a Friday afternoon.

“I’m just... not gonna say anything anymore,” he grumbled, but he didn’t look upset.

“Why not?” El waited for an answer, but as promised, he didn’t say another word. So, she did what she always did when he tried to ignore her.

She tilted her head slightly, tugging his paper at just the right moment and causing him to draw a long line with his recently sharpened pencil. Will pressed his palm firmly on the paper to keep it from sliding, but otherwise pretended nothing happened and erased the line. Just as he put his pencil against the paper, the tip broke in an unnatural way. He looked at his pencil sharpener, but it mysteriously slid across the table out of his reach. Will released a drawn-out sigh, sunk into his chair, and resigned to his fate.

“It’s Friday, Will.” El said, trying to sound innocent and oblivious. Will stacked his papers and placed them in his trapper keeper.

“El, I can’t. It’ll be weird...” he tried. wishing he had been more careful with his story to avoid this situation.

“It won’t be weird.”

“I can’t.” Will stood and made his way to his room. El slid out of her chair to follow. She paused at his door, watching him pack his homework away for another time. When he finished, he sat on the edge of the bed, returning her gaze.

“Why do you want to know so badly? It’s not that big of a deal.”

“Then... why are you so worried?”

“... I think it’s better if you don’t. It’s complicated.”

“But-”

“If I told you why... I’d have to explain other things. There are things you have no idea about... and that’s good.”

Will sat the bed next to him. El tried to hide her frustration, but such a task was difficult. Their awareness of each other wasn’t one way. She read him like a book and vice versa. She wasn’t resentful that he wouldn’t tell her, just confused.

They sat shoulder to shoulder and Will spoke.

“When I was younger, I felt... different. I don’t know how to explain except... I’m not jealous. Or upset. Nothing has changed. He’s still my friend, and I couldn’t be happier. I think... if I liked him, it wouldn’t be that way. Right? Wouldn’t I care more about... who he hangs out with or who he likes if I still liked him?”

El shrugged, unable to answer. She felt jealousy before. On TV, girls and boys got jealous when the person they loved was with someone else. But, as everyone told her many times, TV wasn’t everything. TV wasn’t the best way to navigate her relationship. Or deepen her friendships. Or understand real life. Will’s secret feelings might be something TV can’t explain either.

Will stood and went to his desk. “Well, we have a lot of cards to make, right? Valentines is practically over and everyone will be home soon.” He opened the drawer and pulled out clean paper to replace the sheets El ruined at the kitchen table. “We still have a bit of time.”

“Will?” El turned on the bed as he gathered colored pencils and crayons.

“Yeah?”

“Will you tell me everything someday?”

“... Sure.” His said in an unconvincing tone.

“... Now you have to promise.”

“What? Why?”

“Promise?”

“... Ok. I... I promise.”

#### **Author's Note:**

Had this fic sitting on the back burner. Was originally part of the bigger fic, but got cut. Some things have changed, others not so much.

In case you were confused about anything:

Will is initially afraid to tell El anything about his past/present crush/love (guess who) because he's worried about her reaction. It's the 1980's folks. I've seen a few Will coming out fics and while of course people can write it anyway they want to, there's no way Will would tell just anyone. If anyone at all. (I think he'd actually tell Joyce and Jonathan first, this conversation with El was a happy accident that she doesn't completely understand)

Will was afraid to tell El anything. He quickly realizes El hasn't been exposed to homophobia and obviously wouldn't be upset with him. She's still slowly adapting to society and all of her close friends and family aren't extreme homophobic buttholes. Unless she learned to be homophobic from TV (which is not entirely unlikely I guess??), she most likely wouldn't see anything wrong with a boy liking a boy or a girl liking a girl.

Will doesn't explain his worries as he thinks it's better that she never learns most people in the entire world would view him as a monster if they knew. Plus, it'd be a weird conversation to reveal they like/

liked the same person.

I believe in this scenario, El will someday learn/understand why Will was afraid to have this conversation with her and join the secret Will Protection Squad with Joyce and Jonathan.